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ABSTRACT

While there has been an increase in the number of women elected to state legislatures, little is known about the impact of gender on state legislation. A longitudinal analysis was conducted of bills proposed by individual legislators in the Arizona State Legislature between 1969 and 1986 to investigate the relationship of gender to public policy output. Women legislators were hypothesized, first, to initiate more bills in traditional women's interest areas than men; second, to initiate more bills on feminist issues than men; and third, to have less success in securing passage for their proposed bills than men. Drawing on Kanter's work in organizations, the proportion of women in the legislature was introduced as a control variable; a minimum of 15 percent was hypothesized to be necessary for women to function effectively in the legislature. Support was found for the first two hypotheses about women legislators' areas of policy specialization, but only after women held more than 15 percent of the legislative seats. The third hypothesis was not supported, but the reasons varied according to the percentage of seats occupied by women. This study suggests that proportional group size may be an important consideration in the evaluation of the impact of gender on public policy. Two statistical tables and a 36-item bibliography are included. (Author/JB)

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THE IMPACT OF WOMEN ON PUBLIC POLICY IN THE ARIZONA LEGISLATURE

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Paper prepared for delivery at the 1989 Annual Meeting of
the American Political Science Association
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DOES THEIR DIFFERENCE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
THE IMPACT OF WOMEN ON PUBLIC POLICY IN THE ARIZONA LEGISLATURE

This study addresses hitherto neglected aspects of the role of gender in public policy-making at the state level. In recent years, research on women in politics has increased almost as fast as the number of women participating in the public sphere. Most research has tended to focus on inputs to the political process and relatively little is known about the outputs--the impact of elected women officials on public policy. The underlying assumption has been that electing women to high public office will have a discernable impact:

When we elect to Congress groups of citizens whose entry into that body was once improbable, we increase the likelihood that perspectives and beliefs peculiar to these people as a class will be reflected in government decisions (Gertzog, 1984).

Is this true in the case of women? That is the issue addressed here, through intensive analysis of legislation introduced in the Arizona State Legislature over a twenty year period, during which the gender composition of the legislature changed markedly.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM ELECTED WOMEN IN STATE LEGISLATURES?

The number of women serving in state legislatures has nearly quadrupled in the past fifteen years. Nationally women hold an average of 15.5 percent of all legislative seats, though their participation varies considerably from state to state (Center for the American Woman and Politics, 1987). As women become a permanent and growing part of state legislatures, have their perspectives and beliefs increasingly been reflected in government decisions?

Much research on this topic has focused on feminist issues, ignoring the empirical question of the extent to which women legislators work in areas traditionally considered of interest to women. Traditional interests are interpreted here to mean issues associated with the domestic concerns of women, such as children, nurturance, child care, welfare, reproduction, and education (Sapiro, 1981), or associated with their civic worker function (Diamond, 1977), such as prostitution, schools, and public health (Mezey, 1978a). Darcy, Welch and Clark (1987) also name education, social welfare, and children as "consistent with women's social role," and Werner (1968) identified problems associated with motherhood, education and family as "home policy." While women's traditional interests are thus defined in terms of subject matter areas, feminist interests are defined here in terms of the goal or direction of the public policy: promoting equality for or improving the status of women.

Heretofore politics has been structured to minimize attention to both these interests, which are interpreted as concerns of the private sphere of social life. Yet, as Sapiro (1981) notes, the "private arrangements" of women have been determined in great measure by law and public policy. What impact, then, do women have when they enter the legislature, on public policy affecting

women? In this study impact is measured in two ways: 1) initiation of public policy proposals; and 2) their enactment. Although Saltzstein's (1986) study demonstrated some impact for women mayors on female public employment, and similar research has shown the impact of Black officeholding on urban policy (Karnig and Welch, 1980; Keller, 1978), education policy (Meier, 1984), and Black employment (Eisinger, 1982), little has been done at the state level on women's impact on legislative public policy output.

In regard to initiation of policy proposals, past research (e.g., Deutchman, 1985/6; Gurin, 1985; Gilligan, 1979 & 1982; Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986) on male/female differences in socialization, psychology, and public opinion would make it reasonable to expect women legislators to specialize in different policy areas than male legislators. Specifically, women would be more likely than their male colleagues to initiate proposals in traditional women's interest areas, e.g., child care, and in feminist issue areas (Leader, 1977), although at a somewhat lower level of support (Mezey, 1978a; 1978b).

On the second measure of impact, an important aspect of legislators' success is their ability to enact public policy proposals into law (Olson and Nonidez, 1972). Characteristics of the institutional setting can have an effect on women legislators' success, especially where they operate as small minorities (Lilie et al, 1982; Mezey, 1978a; Kanter, 1977). But research at the state level has generally neglected issues of group size when considering women lawmakers' impact on public policy.¹ Based on her work in organization theory, Kanter (1977) found that the relative number (or proportion) of different people in a group affects the behavior of the group's dominant and minority members. The ratio of 85 males to 15 females found in an average state legislature would be defined by Kanter as a "skewed" group, one which has negative connotations for the minority ("token") members. In a less polarized "tilted" group, with a ratio of 65:35, dominants are no longer overwhelming and coalition-building may occur.

The effects of differences in proportional representation in legislatures has received little attention, yet such a perspective could change the interpretation of some research findings in this area. Kanter reports that tokens have higher visibility, their differences are subject to polarization or exaggeration, and all tokens are viewed as stereotypical members of their group. While all tokens do not demonstrate the same response to their situation, two common types of token response are over-achievement or, more commonly, invisibility. Kanter suggests that what has been identified as the "fear of success" phenomenon among women in male peer groups could actually be the actions of a token trying to limit visibility. Similarly the women whom Antolini (1984) identified as "closet feminists," those who deny being feminists but who support feminist policies, could be tokens trying to minimize their visibility in male dominated legislatures. As women occupy a larger proportion of legislative seats, the possibility exists for issues of significance to women to gain acceptance through normal legislative behavior.

Due to their presence in state legislatures as a minority, women legislators are more sensitive to discrimination (Antolini, 1984), increasing the likelihood of proposing policies which promote equality for or improve the status of women (feminist bills). Another consideration is whether women legislators

have been able to successfully translate their interests into public policy by securing enactment of their proposals. As a consequence of their status as a minority in state legislatures, especially if as a "skewed" group (under 15%), it could be expected that women legislators would be less successful in obtaining passage for any of their proposed bills. These hypotheses are summarized below.

- H1: Women representatives will be more likely to initiate legislation in areas considered to be traditional women's issues, e.g., child care, than their male colleagues.
- H2: Women representatives will be more likely than their male colleagues to propose legislation that promotes the equality of or improves the status of women (feminist legislation).
- H3: Bills proposed by women representatives will have less chance of being enacted into law than bills proposed by their male counterparts.

METHODOLOGY

In order to test these hypotheses about the effects of gender on public policy, a longitudinal analysis was conducted of legislation proposed by men and women serving in the Arizona State Legislature between 1969 and 1986. The data consist of all bills, memorials and resolutions proposed by individuals (as opposed to committees) in 10 regular legislative sessions between 1969 and 1986 (special sessions were not included). Bills are substantive proposals for new laws, amendments to existing laws, or appropriations. Memorials are usually addressed to officials of the federal government requesting that some action be taken, and require the governor's signature. Resolutions can be of several forms: simple, concurrent, and joint. Simple resolutions express the opinion of one body of the legislature and have no standing as a law; concurrent resolutions are used for amendments to the U.S. or Arizona constitution or for measures that require a referendum; and joint resolutions require a roll call vote and the governor's signature (Mason and Hink, 1972). Proposals which were completely honorary in nature, for example marking the death of a former legislator, are referred to as "honorary" proposals; all others are referred to as proposals or simply as bills.²

The Arizona state legislature is composed of a Senate with 30 members and a House with 60. Beginning with the 29th Legislature (1969-70), the data for this study were drawn from every second Legislature, including the 31st (1973-74), the 33rd (1977-78), the 35th (1981-82) and the 37th (1985-86). The selected years are generally representative of the Arizona legislature for that time period, during which its makeup changed from 12 women to 18, a net gain of 6 seats and a 50 percent increase. This growth took place almost entirely in the House, where women rose from 9 to 14 seats; the net gain in the Senate for women was only one seat. The sampled years allow a comparison of the legislative output of women members both in a "token" condition (less than 15%) and in a somewhat more favorable "tilted" condition (about 35%). However, as the research design does not include a comparison or control group, it cannot account for the contribution of other factors that could also have affected the findings (see Conclusions).

For the time period studied, Republicans formed the majority in both chambers (except briefly in the Senate in 1975-78), and the increase in women legislators has occurred almost entirely among Republicans. The net increase for women of 5 seats in the House was divided between 4 Republicans and one Democrat; the one seat increase in the Senate was also a Republican. During the years studied, two women legislators were appointed, both of whom went on to win election on their own.³ Since there were no important differences in procedures between the House and Senate that would affect the analysis, and because there were few women in the Senate, the following analyses are based on all the male and female legislators in both chambers combined.

The number of legislative proposals initiated by individual legislators (as opposed to those put forth by a standing committee) more than doubled from about 800 to over 1,800 bills per two-year legislature. For bills with multiple sponsors, the initiator was determined from documentary records. The number of co-sponsors, while recorded in the study, was not found (in a separate analysis) to be an important factor. The average number of bills initiated by women legislators increased dramatically over the period studied from a low of 4 to a high of 18.

Each proposal was coded for substantive content by using the Arizona Legislative Journal, where a summary makes reference to the subject matter of each proposal. Of the thirty-four subject matter categories of proposed bills encountered in the years analyzed, seven (abortion, children, education, family, health, sex, and welfare) were theoretically identified (a priori) in this study as traditional women's interests. All proposals were also analyzed to identify those explicitly aimed at gaining equality for or improving the status of women, which in this study were identified as feminist bills. Traditional issues were identified based on the subject matter area, while feminist issues were identified based on the policy goal of the bill.⁴

RESULTS

Gender and Women's Traditional Interests. Over the years studied, women steadily increased the scope of their legislative activity to touch nearly all the areas in which men also propose bills. However, women legislators remain more likely than men to propose legislation in areas of traditional interest to women (Table 1). Using a Chi square test, the difference between female and male legislators is statistically significant, supporting Hypothesis 1.

Looking at the individual legislative sessions (Table 2) it can be seen that the trend for male legislators has been relatively stable. The men have rather consistently dedicated about a quarter of their proposals to traditional women's issues. On the other hand, there has been an increase in the concern of women legislators for women's traditional interests which parallels the increase in their numbers in the legislature. At first, the proportion of bills proposed by women and by men concerning traditional women's issues was not too different (1969-70 and 1973-74). However, from the 33rd Legislature (1977-78) onward, more than one-third of women's bills have fallen into the areas of abortion, children, education, family, public health, sex, and welfare. A Chi square test performed for each legislative session showed the

differences between women and men legislators to be statistically significant in the latter three periods considered. Women legislators today are addressing many substantive areas with their bills, but they still initiate a larger proportion of their bills in traditional women's interest areas than men do.

An important point must be noted here. For this first hypothesis, bills identified as falling into traditional women's issue areas were not distinguished in terms of whether they supported the status quo, advanced the goals of feminist women, or were anti-feminist. For example, a bill proposing to expand state funding for child care and another to decrease state regulation of child care services were both coded simply as traditional women's issues. The large number of such bills demonstrates that traditional women's issues have consistently been part of normal policy-making by legislators, occupying one quarter of the legislative agenda. In fact the majority of all such bills were proposed by male legislators (1244 versus 298 for women), because there were many more men than women in the legislature. The difference is that when women served in relatively few numbers, they addressed traditional women's issues to no greater extent than their male colleagues; when women surpassed 15 percent of the Arizona State Legislature, they increased their attention to these issues and the gap between the importance of these issues for men and women legislators became statistically significant. Whether bills proposed by women legislators in women's traditional interest areas are, in addition, pro-feminist, is an important empirical question, which remains to be addressed by future research.

Gender and Feminist Issues. The second hypothesis probes the extent to which women legislators are not providing merely symbolic representation ("standing for" women) but are pursuing substantive policies that will improve the status of women ("acting for" women), i.e., feminist legislation (Pitkin, 1967). As shown in Table 1, women legislators are more likely than men to propose feminist legislation. For all years combined, using a Chi square test, the gender difference is statistically significant, supporting Hypothesis 2. Looking at the longitudinal trend (Table 2), there was virtually no difference in the proportion of women's and men's bills initiated in this area in the 1969-70 period. However, in most subsequent periods women dedicated a much greater percentage of their bills to improving the status of women than men did, (although the small absolute number of feminist proposals must be kept in mind when discussing statistical significance). The status of women remains one area which is more heavily addressed by women legislators than by men, even in a Republican-dominated legislature, supporting Leader (1977).

Gender and Public Policy Enactment. This final hypothesis addresses the relative success of women legislators in gaining passage for the bills they propose, compared to men (see Table 1). Overall, women have been more successful than men in enacting their proposals, which does not support Hypothesis 3. There is no single explanation for this success; rather the reasons have varied in relation to time, substantive content of proposals, and to proportional group size. The detailed figures can be seen in Table 2.

In 1969-70, the enactment rate for all bills proposed by women was a high 52.5 percent, over twice the rate of 21.1 percent for bills proposed by men. Some of this success was due to a concentration on honorary declarations,

which are almost universally enacted; however women's non-honorary bills were also enacted at a high rate (40.4%). In the 1973-74 sessions, the rate of enactment for women's bills was down to 39.6 percent (versus 22.3% for men); some of this drop was due to a decrease in honorary proposals by women. Although the women legislators in these sessions proposed very few bills, they were able to secure passage for a sizeable proportion of them. This may be the outcome of women struggling to limit their visibility with low-risk bills; it may also be evidence that women in general are more risk-averse (Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986).

For the third session considered, 1977-78, the enactment rate fell by more than half for women's bills to 17.7 percent, versus 22.3 percent for men's bills. This coincided with the increase in the proportion of women to over 15 percent of the legislature for the first time, a virtual explosion in the average number of pieces of legislation proposed by women representatives (from 4 to 13), a steep decline in the number of honorary bills initiated by women, and their introduction of legislation in a wider range of subject areas than ever before. However, many of the women legislators were newly elected, bills were being proposed by the women representatives in areas which had not previously seen contributions from them, and the Senate went narrowly Democratic during this legislative session, while the House remained under Republican control.

In 1981-82 the enactment rate for women's bills climbed back up to 21.3 percent, more comparable to the rate of 26.8 percent for men. By this time there were very few honorary bills being proposed by women. In the 1985-86 sessions this trend continued and, despite the wide spectrum of substantive areas involved, women were successful in enacting 39.6 percent of the bills they initiated, versus 30 percent for men. The reasons for this success were not immediately apparent. Could the success of women legislators be due to higher rates of enactment for bills in traditional women's interest areas or feminist bills? What was the fate of bills proposed in traditional women's interest areas, or feminist proposals?

As can be seen in Table 1, bills proposed in traditional women's interest areas generally had a slightly lower rate of enactment (23.1%) overall than other bills (27.3%). An even lower rate of enactment was observed for feminist proposals (17.6%). Thus the higher rate of passage for bills initiated by women legislators is not due to the fact that they specialize to a greater extent than men in substantive areas that have higher enactment rates.

In the same table it can also be seen that bills concerning women's issues had a better chance of passing if proposed by women legislators rather than by men. Bills proposed in traditional women's areas by women legislators were enacted (31.2%) about as often as women's bills in other areas (30.7%), while bills proposed in traditional women's areas by men (23.1%) were not enacted as often as men's other bills (27.1%) or as often as the bills proposed in this area by women. The same pattern was observed for feminist bills, where those proposed by women legislators had as good a chance of enactment (26.7%) as women's bills in other areas (although there was tremendous variability over time on this point), while those proposed by male legislators generally had

less chance of passing (17.6%) than men's other bills or than feminist bills proposed by women. Thus having more women in the legislature may improve the chances of passage for bills in these two areas.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women do make a difference in state legislatures. They propose proportionally more legislation in traditional women's interest areas and in support of feminist interests than do male legislators. Women legislators obtain passage for their bills in these two areas more often than men do. The trends indicate that women legislators are becoming more successful at enacting legislation than male legislators, even in areas other than traditional women's issues and feminist issues. However, their contributions to public policy do not end there. In the transition to more than 15 percent of the Arizona State Legislature, women changed their legislative participation. They proposed bills in many areas not identified as traditional women's interests, such as commerce, state and local government, and transportation. They increased their bill-making activity, and increased their success at gaining enactment for their proposals in all areas. Thus it would seem that proportional group size is an intervening variable in the relationship of gender to public policy in state legislatures.

Further research is needed to explore the questions raised here: When are women legislators more willing to propose bills in traditional women's areas and feminist issue areas than men? Are the bills proposed in traditional women's interest areas by women legislators generally also pro-feminist, and, if not, what could be the explanation? How do women legislators obtain higher rates of enactment for their proposed public policies than men? And what happens in states where women occupy less than 15 percent of the seats in the state legislature, versus those states where they occupy more than 15 percent? What happens during the transition from a "token" to a "tilted" (35%) group? Studies are needed which compare state legislatures with relatively low proportions of women with legislatures where the proportion of women is high.

Because of the limitations of the present longitudinal design, comparative studies carried out simultaneously in other states could help eliminate rival explanations for these findings. First are characteristics of the institution. For example, in more professional (or less amateur) state legislatures, as turnover rates decrease, the length of on-the-job experience may influence how women legislators shape their agenda (Bell and Price, 1975). Different findings may occur in state legislatures which are heavily Democratic or more balanced, in comparison with the decisive Republican majority in Arizona. Whether or not there is a women's caucus may also be important (Mueller, 1984). Second are characteristics of the women themselves (Carroll, 1985; Darcy, Welch and Clark, 1987). There may be age and cohort effects, as younger elected women enter the legislature through career paths similar to those of men, e.g., law and business (Thompson, 1985). Finally, there are characteristics of the environment, such as the general impact of the women's movement (Mueller, 1982). The effects of perceived public opinion on public policy, Noelle-Neumann's (1984) "spiral of silence" argument, may also have relevance here. As they increase their numbers, elected women will shape

their legislative agenda with both personal characteristics and institutional experiences that differ from those of women state legislators in the past.

With the proportions of women in state legislatures continuing to increase, the next few years will be crucial ones for studying this phenomenon.⁶ For example, Arizona now has 30% of its legislative seats held by women, and will have its first woman Speaker of the House in the 1989 session (Kelly, 1988). More work remains to be done on how women's formal roles in state legislatures, such as holding party office, leadership positions, committee assignments and committee chairships, etc., affect public policy. Research is also needed on women's informal roles: other than initiating legislation, how do women influence public policy in state legislatures? Finally, we need to consider whether the increasing visibility of women's interests on the public policy agenda will increase the accessibility of public office for women.

NOTES

1. Two studies that hint at such a relationship focus on the U.S. Congress. Although neither author specifically tied their findings to the change in the ratio of women to men in Congress, Gertzog (1984) tentatively concluded that U.S. Congresswomen were increasingly proposing legislation which pursued gender equality or advanced or affirmed women's concerns, and Francovic (1977) found some evidence for increasing convergence among women in the U.S. House of Representatives as evidenced by their voting records on women's issues.
2. The category of "honorary" was also used by Costain and Costain (1985) in their analysis of Congressional legislation to designate proposals referring to stamps, coins, days commemorating individuals or groups, etc. Honorary bills are included here because of the important changes over time in the proportion of women legislators' agenda they represent.
3. One of these was the present Supreme Court Justice, Sandra Day O'Connor.
4. These two schemes are not mutually exclusive, but in practice there was little overlap. For example, a proposal to make malpractice insurance equally available to midwives was coded as both a traditional (health) issue and a feminist issue, while a general proposal to mandate equal pay for equal work was coded only as a feminist issue.
5. For comparison, the 50-state average enactment rate for 1963-74 was 36 percent; the rate for Arizona was 26 percent (Rosenthal, 1981: 258-259).
6. A number of new research projects have been funded by grants from the Center for the American Woman and Politics at Rutgers University.

TABLE 1. LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY OF MEN AND WOMEN IN
THE ARIZONA STATE LEGISLATURE, 1969-1986

Activity	Bills Proposed By		Total
	Women	Men	

BILLS PROPOSED			
<u>Traditional Women's Interests</u> ¹			
Number of bills proposed	298	1244	1542
Percent of all women's/men's bills	34.9%**	24.1%**	25.6%
<u>Status of Women (Feminist bills)</u> ²			
Number of bills proposed	45	91	136
Percent of all women's/men's bills	5.3%**	1.8%**	2.3%
<u>All Other Areas</u>			
Number of bills proposed	511	3824	4335
Percent of all women's/men's bills	59.8%**	74.1%**	72.1%
<u>Total</u>			
Number of bills proposed	854	5159	6013
Percent of all women's/men's bills	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
BILLS ENACTED			
<u>Traditional Women's Interests</u>			
Number of bills enacted	93	270	363
Percent enacted	31.2%	21.7%**	23.1%
<u>Status of Women (Feminist bills)</u>			
Number of bills enacted	12	12	24
Percent enacted	26.7%	13.2%**	17.6%
<u>All Other Areas</u>			
Number of bills enacted	157	1027	1184
Percent enacted	30.7%	26.9%	27.3%
<u>Total</u>			
Number of bills enacted	262	1309	1571
Percent enacted	30.7%	25.4%	26.1%

*P .05 **P .01

¹traditional women's interests are defined as abortion, children, education, family, public health, sex, and welfare.

²Feminist bills are defined as bills that explicitly seek equality for women or seek to improve the status of women.

TABLE 2. LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY BY SESSION IN THE
ARIZONA STATE LEGISLATURE, 1969-1986

Activity	Years				
	1969-70	1973-74	1977-78	1981-82	1985-86
Percent Women in the Legislature	12.2 (11)	14.3 (13)	16.7 (15)	18.9 (17)	20.0 (18)
Average Number of Bills Initiated					
Female Legislators	5.4	4.1	13.2	13.0	17.9
Male Legislators	9.6	10.0	13.3	14.1	21.8
Percentage of Their Bills Initiated in Traditional Women's Interests					
Female Legislators (N)	18.6% (11)	26.4% (14)	33.8%** (67)	39.4%** (87)	36.8%** (119)
Male Legislators (N)	24.3% (185)	24.3% (190)	19.1%** (190)	26.0%** (272)	25.9%** (407)
Percentage of Their Bills Initiated on the Status of Women (Feminist bills)					
Female Legislators (N)	1.7% (1)	7.6%** (4)	7.1%** (14)	3.2% (7)	5.9%** (19)
Male Legislators (N)	1.6% (12)	1.4%** (11)	1.5%** (15)	2.2% (23)	1.9%** (30)
Percentage of All Their Bills Enacted					
Female Legislators (N)	52.5%** (31)	39.6%** (21)	17.7% (35)	21.3% (47)	39.6%** (128)
Male Legislators (N)	21.1%** (160)	22.3%** (174)	22.3% (222)	26.8% (281)	30.0%** (472)

**Female/Male differences are significant at p .01.

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